

Bureau shortly after 3 p.m., he knew it was time for a decision that might be unpopular with both field crews and the executives who monitor overtime expenses.

He had spent 27 years in the Trouble Department before becoming Assistant Superintendent of Electric Distribution nine years ago. Drawing on that experience, he made a decision which comes perhaps a half dozen times a year: Hold all of the field crews, which were scheduled off duty within an hour.

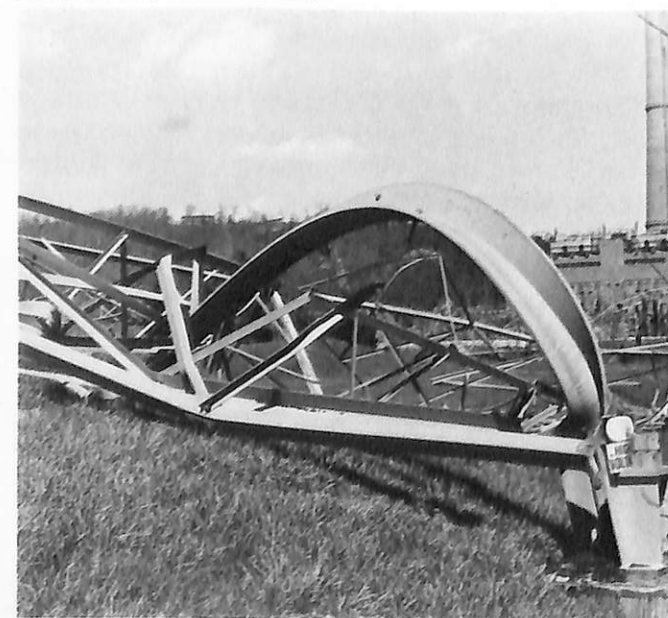
Beard contacted all section heads, who notified supervisors in the field through the company's radio system. The system is extensive. Two-way radios are in each line truck, all emergency vehicles and in the cars of supervisors and other key personnel. There is even a backup transmitter in case the main transmitter should fail.

The alerted crews watched the clouds already boiling over Louisville's southwest horizon and awaited whatever work would be dealt them by the impending storm.

Watching the approaching storm from quite another vantage point was Superintendent of Electrical Production Joe Warren. He was peering at the battery of meters that monitor the entire system from the load dispatcher's office at Third and Washington Streets. By mid-afternoon, they were beginning to record a series of stunning blows unparalleled in his 40 years with the company.

"At 2:34 p.m. we got a 'digger' on the chart that told us our neighbors to the north were in trouble. The first lines from the Gallagher generating station in New Albany, Ind., to the north to Bedford went out," Warren recalled.

No. 2 Tower, Madison, Ind.



Forty-eight minutes later, all other Public Service Indiana lines to Gallagher went down and that generating plant became marooned as part of what soon would become Louisville's electric "island."

At 3:48 p.m., the meters disclosed that the line connecting L G & E with the Clifty Creek plant near Madison, Ind., was severed. The storm system's fury would reach that picturesque community on the banks of the Ohio within minutes.

At 3:53 p.m., Louisville lost its connection to Southern Indiana Gas & Electric and part of the Kentucky Utilities system from the same storm which ravaged Brandenburg.

Within a minute, interconnecting lines to the north became inoperative.

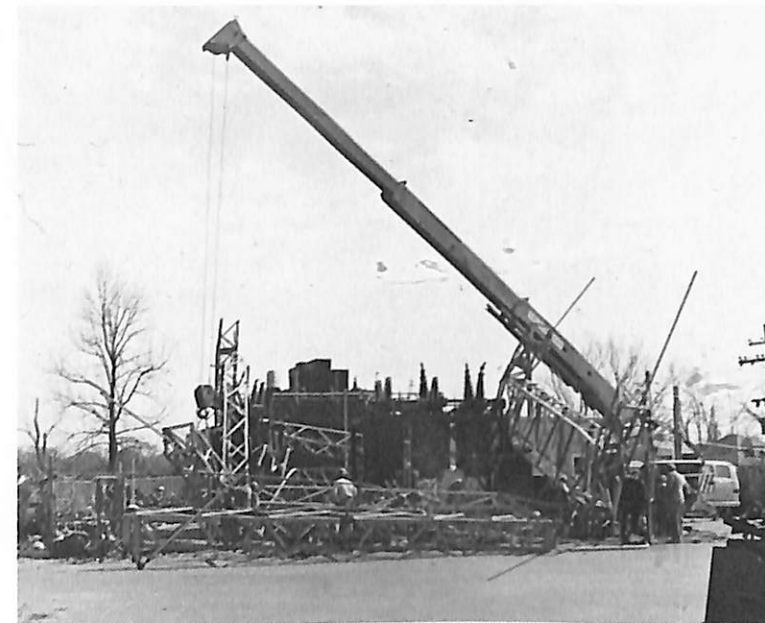
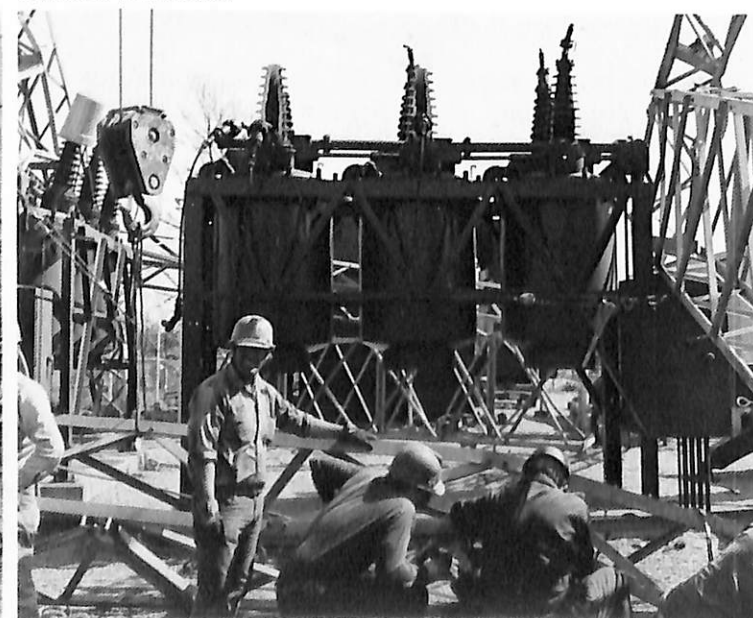
Then, like an eerie calm before Louisville's own storm, 55 minutes passed quietly before the bank of meters at the Waterside Generating Station again began to register destruction.

Part of that destruction sheared off Louisville's final ties to outside power sources. At 4:50 p.m. the remaining link to Kentucky Utilities was broken. Nine minutes later, the TVA link went down and this terse message was logged in the load dispatcher's office: "L G & E now separated from outside."

The same blitz which had cut off Louisville's power supply lines already was roaring through the city, knocking out circuits and substations in showers of sparks visible to those who viewed the storm safely from afar.

At 4:40 p.m., three minutes after ripping the roof off Freedom Hall and flattening the horse barns at the fairgrounds, the storm knocked out the Highland

Hillcrest Substation



Hillcrest Substation

substation and devastated the Highlands area it serves. The storm roared through Cherokee Park.

Two minutes later, the meters recorded the direct hit at Hillcrest substation on Frankfort Avenue. This loss of power cut off Louisville's water source for several hours. The Harrod's Creek substation off Highway 42 was not in the tornado path. But it blinked off at the same time because of an electrical fault in a circuit located in a nearby tornado-damaged area.

At 4:44 p.m., meters showed that the Clifton substation off Frankfort Avenue went out of business. This blow eliminated a back-up power source to Louisville Water Company.

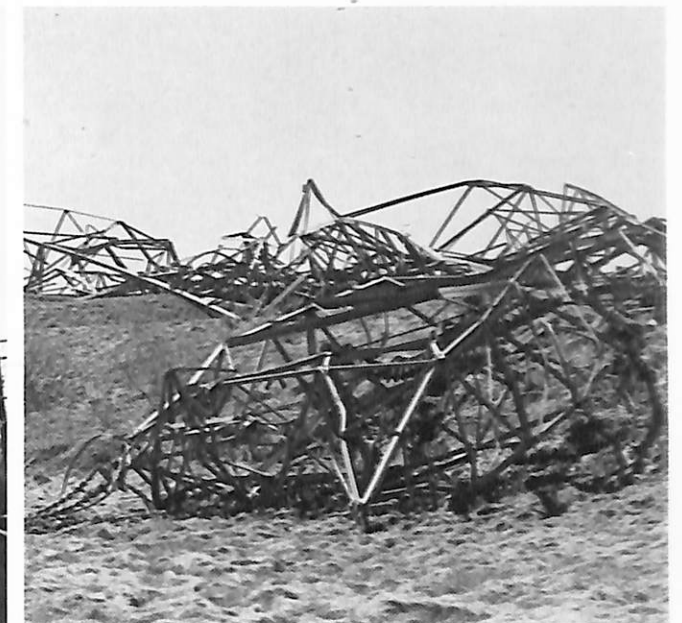
Meanwhile, airborne debris was shorting circuits and activating circuit breakers domino fashion along the storm's trail of devastation. The company's Clifton, Hillcrest, Harrod's Creek, Aiken, Skylight, Highland, Lyndon, Crestwood, Breckinridge, Collins, and Hurstbourne substations all went down. Individual circuits were lost at the Terry, Taylor, Kenwood, Fern Valley, Standiford, Clay, Ethel and Seminole substations.

Nine of these substations were knocked out simultaneously at 5:39 p.m. when the Middletown transformer, its five 66-kilovolt lines, and its ties to those substations all relayed.

"A breaker out there failed to trip and that tripped all of the rest of the breakers," Warren said. "It just cleared the house of everything that was connected to it."

He looked in disbelief as the charts recording the city's use of electricity began a sharp downward plunge.

"Most of the interrupted service was in residential areas. An individual home does not use much power,"



Tower, Madison, Ind.

he said. "But the mass effect was the same as if everyone at Appliance Park had just thrown the switch and gone home."

Across town in the electrical distribution office, Bill Beard expressed the same kind of disbelief.

"Our transmission system just fell apart," he said.

At 5:39 p.m. Wednesday, April 3, 1974, the longest day for Louisville Gas & Electric Company, and for many of its customers, was just dawning.

*"I don't know how to begin to express my gratitude to you and your workers for saving our home last night. I was alone and frightened when I heard a most horrible noise, and then the entire neighborhood lit up. I later found out this was due to a live wire. Our whole back yard was on fire . . ."*

Assessing priorities after the storm passed was an easy matter. Tornadic winds which had jerked houses off their foundations also had torn loose natural gas service lines to these houses.

Natural gas was blowing into the atmosphere from many sources. The possibility of explosions and fires was perhaps as great a threat to human safety in the aftermath of the storm as were the tornadoes themselves.

Adding to that danger was Louisville's dwindling water supply. Without electricity, Louisville Water Company could not boost the water pressure, which was dropping rapidly in many parts of the city, or replenish the water supply in the reservoir. This shortage could become a serious hindrance if fires were to break out.